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My Teaching Philosophy

It is safe to say that my teaching philosophy has been slowly becoming a melting pot of various ideas from various texts in various philosophical contexts. Following any one philosophy wholeheartedly would discount what exactly philosophy means. The truest wisdom is to follow your own ideas. I would say that I didn’t build new ideas this semester, but I did grow in my understanding of what I have always believed. The growth in discovering who I am as an educator has been effectively steep this semester, in both this class and in Social Studies Methods.

The biggest philosophical divide in education seems to be involving the idea of standardized testing. My ideas on the subject place me somewhere between perennialism and essentialism. Just as most teachers point out, there are a lot of flaws in the testing of students. It’s easy to say that standardized tests do not show is learning is actually taking place or not. The way I see it, standardized testing could be used effectively, if it is used correctly. The issue arises because of the pressure placed on students to do well on these exams. That pressure causing students to worry about their scores, and takes away the potential value by polluting statistics with the answers of stressed students.

Standardized tests do have a place in schools, though. They could be very effective tools of showing differences in specific schools. For example, if students of one teacher all do well, whereas another teacher’s all score poorly, it would be clear that there is a clear that there are differences in teaching and/or learning styles. Statistically speaking, it would be very interesting to use a variety of different standardized test that focus on specific intelligences to see what areas have the most of them (i.e. tests could show which metropolitan areas have the most musical learners).

A big part of my teaching philosophy revolves around Essentialism. Basically, I think there are certain core ideas students should develop. In developing these core ideas, students will be able to expand later on in their educational lives. If students successfully master the basic information early on, it creates a scenario that makes it easier for the class as a whole, since there won’t be much backtracking to keep a few students on point. This would require some collaboration between teachers of different grade levels in order to be fully successful.

A big part of what I believe has to do with the differentiation that happens in the classroom. Ideally, there shouldn’t be a ton of differentiation necessary to successfully teach a class. That being said, I know it is necessary for students with IEPs, and I should focus on the multiple intelligences. Beyond that, students should have the same basic level of understanding as they progress in their schooling. There shouldn’t be a need for secondary education teachers to backtrack to information students should have from elementary school. Backtracking like this is detrimental to the students who are starting out where they should be.

As I pointed out, this model would be most successful if collaboration was taking place between different grade level teachers. For instance, if secondary teachers could communicate more efficiently with elementary teachers to align our expectations, then the education system would work better in creating growth in students. Part of this philosophy also relates back to the fact that I am a concrete sequential learner. It just doesn’t make sense to me to teach step 5 of a process before making sure students understand steps one through four.

Even though I am prominently Essentialist, I also have some Humanist characteristics in my philosophy. I mostly just agree with Rousseau’s concept that humans as a whole are born as good people. This concept has a strong impact on my view of discipline in the classroom. I’ll admit that the Discipline with Dignity model has some pros and cons, but I’m a big fan of moving away from using embarrassment as a means of controlling behavior. As far as I see it, the students who act out are the ones who want that attention, so the best way to keep students from acting inappropriately is to show every student positive attention.

Going off of that, the relationships between individual students and teachers are getting worse. My favorite teachers were definitely the ones who I got to know the best. A big part of those particular teachers is that they were my coaches and I went on trips with them. For instance, I went to Italy with my Latin class and I grew closer to my Latin teacher. It is very important for teachers to become more involved in students’ lives than just as teachers. Extracurricular activities allow students to know their teachers on a completely new level.

It is very easy to point a finger at standardized tests as a cause of this. With these tests, students simply become statistics. However, the tests should not completely dictate teaching style. Teachers can easily build strong personal connections with their students while still preparing them for the big tests. Looking back at my Latin teacher again, he used personal anecdotes to add humor and humanism to his classes. His stories ranged from working at Dunkin Donuts to the birth of his first child, but he was also capable of tying them back into the content.

Another piece of Humanism that I’m a fan of is student choice. This goes along with my interest in service learning. I want to give students the chance to really consider how our political system works by actively researching and aiding a movement they are passionate about. The Humanist aspects show themselves in the fact that students are being asked to look deeply into something that they think is right. I can stand in front of a classroom and lecture about the concepts of right and wrong all day, but it means nothing without students making real decisions.

The first philosopher’s beliefs that stood out to me belonged to Socrates.  Similar to Socrates, I thoroughly believe that asking the right questions can draw answers out of students.  Socrates’s theories started the movement toward students discovering answers for themselves.  Although I’m not incredibly gun hoe about students working without guidance, I do think that by leading them in a certain direction with proper questions can lead to a very positive outcome.

Even though Booker T. Washington’s philosophy was mainly constructed to aid in the further develop of African Americans being integrated into the education system, I think some of his ideas can be implemented into my own classroom.  I think that it is very important for all students to learn to be self-reliance by the time they graduate.  Self-reliance is a concept that essentially allows American citizens to have freedom.  Without self-reliance, students will be forced into situations where they will not be able to take care of themselves or their families.

Froebel’s ideas are mainly centered on early childhood education, but I’m still a strong believe in her view of the teacher.  Part of my strong Essentialist belief is that students need to learn the fundamentals in order to effectively learn in secondary education.  Froebel’s ideas focus on teaching those fundamental ideas at a young age in order to promote growth in her students.  The idea of growth is really what fuels my teaching philosophy.  If students some into the classroom six steps behind everyone else, it will be that much more difficult for them to catch up.

Although some educators might demonize Charlemagne for establishing standardization in education, I choose to praise him. If it wasn’t for Charlemagne’s pragmatist thinking, boys and girls would not be able to experience the publicly funded education system that is currently being used in our country and many other Western countries. Charlemagne’s focus on preserving culture is also a major point in our education system. The stories told in Social Studies classes and the novels read in English classes are focused almost entirely on preserving culture.

Rousseau also impacts my teaching philosophy, to some degree. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau wrote “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (Rousseau 1). This focus on the good in human nature is what I want to preserve in my classroom. In the past few years, it seems as though most of our society has moved toward attacking the education system as causing students to fail. I think that if more teachers show their students this belief that they are all good, then the rates of success in our country will increase immensely.

I also strongly support the philosophical ideals of Webster. Essentially, he believed in the concept of universal education. Many other philosophers focused on this same thing. However, Webster actually was a former educator, and he believed in the necessity for teachers who know what they are doing. Similarly to Charlemagne, Webster’s beliefs led us closer to standardization, but he should be praised for his work. His work dawned teacher evaluation, which is essential in making sure that students are learning the content they need. Webster’s move towards evaluation also created a heavier focus on different pedagogies.

Non-traditional schools play an interesting role in my philosophical ideas.  In concept, they sound very cool.  It seems as though non-traditional schools are an effective means of teaching beyond the normal curriculum.  However, it seems as though the model for non-traditional schools is not yet ready to be implemented.  The organization that is necessary to run an effective school just isn’t there.  On top of that, it seems as though almost all of these non-traditional schools focus almost entirely on science.  This means there is vital information in other content areas that the students are missing out on.

                There is another key piece of the Harpswell School that I have an issue with.  This goes beyond my educational philosophy, but I don’t think that it is a positive that there is no custodial staff or kitchen staff.  The unemployment rates in our country are at record highs, and schools like this are making them worse.  This would also have a negative effect in the classroom.  This takes vital time away from education planning.

                If it becomes possible to create a non-traditional school that is much more heavily focused on Social Studies, I think I would more for it than against it. The issue with having a school focused on Science is that there is so much that the students are missing out on. However, Social Studies cover a very diverse group of topics, and other content areas can easily be integrated into it.

A big piece of my educational philosophy comes from the universal power of Social Studies. My essentialist beliefs allow me to teach my students more than just Social Studies; I can give my students a basic understanding of all of the content areas. That’s not to say that I view myself as an expert in everything, I just think that I have the ability to teach beyond my basic curriculum. I am a firm believer in the importance of electives that allow students to combine multiple content areas into one greater understanding. For example, when I was in high school, I took a Holocaust Studies course that focused heavily on English content ideas.

The film *Teach* gave me the chance to compare my philosophy to the philosophies of a few other new teachers. From a philosophical standpoint, I think Matt captured my thoughts.  At one point in *Teach,* he said that if there isn’t a good foundation, there’s nothing to build one.  This captures the focus of why I believe so strongly in essentialism.  Students have to have some general knowledge in certain subjects before they can build on it and develop more complex ideas.  If students don’t have that basic knowledge, then it becomes significantly more difficult for us to teach our students.

Another major point in this film that caught my attention was the use of new technology and incorporation of new ideas into the classroom.  The statistics used in the film show my thoughts on this.  Similarly to the situation where students were using laptops to increase their education, I think it is effective in the short run to use new technology and concepts.  In the long run, it will be less effective.  Throughout the film, I felt myself rooting for Joel, who relied mainly on his own abilities as a lecturer.

                I also think it was important for this film to show the difficulties that arise in differentiation.  It seemed like Matt did a decent job of this by focusing his time on the students who were falling behind and having the students who were reading on grade level do independent work.  However, I don’t think this strategy would be very effective in a secondary education classroom.  I spent most of my time analyzing Joel, since he teaches the same content as me, and it seems like differentiation would be much more difficult in that environment.

The one piece of this movie that I found upset was the lack of collaboration. I do have a little of a Pragmatist side when it comes to collaboration. Since Pragmatists view the world as always changing, I think the over-arching model for content is changing. At this point, it would be rather easy to fluidly combine content areas, especially in Joel’s World History class. Since he was having so much trouble with students writing theses, he easily could have sought assistance from an English teacher. This scene also caused the Essentialist in me to become very upset, mainly because writing a thesis is one of the key concept points that every student should get out of their education.

The organization of my classroom will be heavily impacted by my philosophy. Since I have such a big emphasis on class discussion, the layout of desks will be in a U-shape. In most cases, I plan on being inside the U in order to act as a facilitator. I also want to make sure my classroom has an appropriate amount of books and shelves.

The motivation factor of my classroom will really come into play in two ways. First, I hope that I will generate motivation by becoming closely connected to my students. Also, I want my students to be able to effectively motivate themselves.

The content of my classroom will be based mainly on class discussions. This way, students will get the chance to ask questions and expand on their understanding. I also hope that I will get the opportunity to incorporate films into my curriculum. Movies tend to really grab the attention of students and cause them to think about a topic in a new way.

The assessments that I will use in my classroom will almost entirely consist of project based learning and service learning. I really love the idea of having students go out and research an issue that interests them. It would be even more beneficial if they could actually help whatever cause they want.

I hope that the emphasis on choice and sharing ideas will generate a positive classroom climate. A lot of government and civics classes are focused on political issues, so it is also important that I just listen to student arguments rather than choosing a side.

The learning focus of my classroom will really be on creating leaders and preparing my students for the future. This will mean that a big part of my class will be oriented to topics that my students want to cover.

I’m not a huge fan of technology integration, but I do see how it is becoming more necessary in the classroom. Personally, I prefer simplified assignments that students can hand-in and get feedback quickly on, over assignments submitted electronically that may not even send properly.

My leadership style will properly be very similar to Joel’s style in Teach. I think that the strongest attribute I have is my own ability to connect with students, so I want to use that as much as possible. Also, I’m not a big believer in detentions, so I may adopt a style that is similar to Discipline With Dignity for my classroom.